



Washington State Senate

The Benton Bulletin

17TH LEGISLATIVE DISTRICT UPDATE FROM SENATOR DON BENTON

VOLUME 2 – FEBRUARY 2006

February 14 was the cutoff for the Senate to consider its own bills, except those necessary to implement the budget. It is my pleasure to share with you my successes on behalf of the 17th District, and to report on some critical issues that still need to be addressed.

Getting tough on registered sex offenders

By a unanimous vote, my Senate colleagues approved my bill to tighten the grip on registered sex offenders. Under this measure, **Senate Bill 6519**, Level III sex offenders, those convicted criminals who are most likely to re-offend after they've served their time, will be required to report to the local sheriff's office every 90 days for five years. If the offender fails to check in regularly, the five years keeps running. I don't think just saying sign up when you get to town is enough. Law enforcement authorities can't track these offenders if they don't know where they are. In addition, authorities may take a photo of the offender at any time, so if his or her appearance changes dramatically, the file will be up-to-date. I also co-sponsored these important measures approved by the Senate:

Senate Bill 6144 makes sure sex offenders convicted out of state and Washington offenders that move out of state and then moves back, are subject to registration requirements.

Senate Bill 6322 increases electronic monitoring for sex offenders under community supervision.

Senate Bill 6172 makes it a crime to communicate by email for immoral purposes with a minor or with someone the person believes to be a minor. This measure also increases penalties for possession of child pornography.

Senate Bill 6319 increases penalties for failure to register as a sex offender.

Senate Bill 6406 makes second-degree assault of a child with sexual motivation a crime under the state's "Two-Strikes" law.

Senate Bill 6460 enhances penalties for felony offenses committed with sexual motivation; doubles new penalties for second offenses; and sentences are made consecutive.

Senate Bill 6502 creates an integrated statewide victim notification system so victims will know if an offender is transferred, released, or escapes, or if there is an upcoming court event at which the victim may be present.

Saving the Camas Community Education program facility

This year, the Legislature will approve a supplemental capital budget to take care of needs that have been identified since we adopted the 2005-07 biennial capital budget last year. One of those needs is ensuring that the more than 600 children who take part in programs at the Camas Military Armory will not lose that facility. The Camas Community Education Department, in partnership with the Camas School District, has a lease on the armory to 2009. Recently, however, the Washington Military Department, which owns the building, has notified the school district that it plans to sell the facility. I sought and won a provision in the capital budget to transfer the building, at no cost, to the school district. Interestingly, the district did own the building at one time. Ownership was transferred to the military department in 1955 for \$10.

I pledge to continue my fight to protect the rights of property owners from government land grabs

The Washington State Constitution is very clear that government cannot use its power of eminent domain to take private property for private use. Yet, the Washington State Supreme Court has issued rulings that fly in

[continued on next page]



Senator
Don Benton

Committee assignments:

- Transportation
- Financial Institutions, Housing & Consumer Protection, ranking Republican
- Early Learning, K-12 & Higher Education
- Government Operations & Elections

Contacting me in Olympia:

Office Address:

109-B Irv Newhouse Bldg.
PO Box 40417
Olympia, WA 98504-0417

Phone: (360) 786-7632

FAX: (360) 786-7819

e-mail: benton.don@leg.wa.gov

Toll-Free Legislative Hotline:
1-800-562-6000

Legislative information on the Internet:
www1.leg.wa.gov





the face of this absolute prohibition. As a result, we are seeing one of our most fundamental rights as citizens being eroded on a case-by-case basis. The only solution is to pass tough laws that back up the constitution, so this travesty does not continue. I introduced a measure, **Senate Bill 6388**, which adds to state law specific language as to what constitutes “public use,” and reaffirms the constitution’s absolute prohibition -- so the court can’t continue to twist the words. I tried to get this bill before the Senate for a vote through a procedural motion, but the majority Democrats moved to adjourn, which takes precedence, before I could say how critical it is that we act now. The Legislature has to act; we simply do not have a choice. I will keep driving that point home every chance I get.

Making sure voters know whose money a candidate is spending

The Senate gave unanimous approval to my bill to ensure transparency in out-of-state campaign contributions and sent the measure to the House of Representatives for consideration. **Senate Bill 6522** closes a loophole in reporting requirements for out-of-state committees that report under the Federal Election Commission (FEC). Our state’s public disclosure law steps up the time between reports as Election Day gets closer. I want to make sure voters know who is giving what to whom before it’s too late. Current law allows reporting to the FEC to satisfy state public disclosure requirements when a committee must report to the FEC.

However, the timelines for reporting are not identical and the election could be over before donors to out-of-state committees would be known. People want to know and need to know the source of campaign money.

Southwest Washington transit districts to get break King County Metro Transit has had for years

As a member of the Senate Transportation Committee, I have the opportunity to find and fix unfair practices when it comes to King County and the rest of the state. I won unanimous Senate passage of my bill to extend to all transit districts a tax break already enjoyed by King County Metro Transit. Under state law, public and private entities that transport people are subject to the public utility tax on gross receipts. Under current law, fare-box revenue is not among the deductions from the gross receipts granted to public transit agencies, except for King County Metro Transit. **Senate Bill 6826**, which I prime-sponsored, allows that deduction for all public transit agencies. We heard testimony in committee that the baffling reporting requirements cost more than the estimated annual revenue to the state general fund. That’s ridiculous. My bill is a small step in the right direction. Many people, especially the elderly and disabled, depend on local bus service. Whatever we can do to reduce operating costs, we should; and what’s more, the law should be consistent and fair.

Please use this space for any comments and drop it in the mail to me or e-mail me your thoughts (benton.don@leg.wa.gov). You can also get a message to me by calling the toll-free Legislative Hotline at 1-800-562.6000.